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ABSTRACT

A retrospective look is taken at the internal workings of a reform of university governance in the Netherlands, including a description of the relations between the various actors involved. It was found that a state of equilibrium has not yet been reached, but the most acute stages of the transition have passed. Then a broader look is taken at certain structural characteristics of Dutch higher education whose weaknesses have generated proposals for reform. The conclusion reached is that the accommodative elitism of the professional oligarchy has shown itself unable to anticipate and cope with the movement toward greater participation in university governance. In the future, the university sector will be more aware of policy issues, but the question is whether it will react defensively or in a way that convinces a broad audience that it has society's interests at heart. (Author/MSE)

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN THE NETHERLANDS: PLURALISM OLD AND NEW

by

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Higher Education and University Governance in the Netherlands: Pluralism Old and New

I Introduction

Two main areas in Dutch higher education have been undergoing reform in recent years: one internal - the administration and governance of the universities, where changes were initiated by the University Administration (Reform) Act of 1970 - and the other external, the projected reshaping of the whole higher education sector, centering around the 1975 Act on the restructuring of higher education. Two points should be made clear at the outset. First, it is impossible to deal adequately in a short paper with the flux and complexity of the political events which form a backdrop, especially to the second theme. The Dutch political picture is a shifting composition of many elements, with coalitions forming and reforming in a manner highly characteristic of modern times and yet peculiar to that country, and it would be unrewarding to attempt a full description of it in this context. Nevertheless, some attention will be given to the process of political decision making, most particularly in relation to the Contours Memorandum[1] and the attitude to educational policy planning which underlay that bold document.

The sketchiness of the politico-sociological background should not, however, be attributed only to the constraints of time and space. I make this remark not as an apologia but as a point of substance, for it reflects an absence of previous political science spadework which has produced such a rich analytical subsoil in most countries. Verzuiling, the system of religious differentiation which still pervades Dutch society, has provided such political stability

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[1] The Contours Memorandum (full title: Contours of a Future Education System: a discussion memorandum) was a consultative document of some 260 pages, published by the Minister, Dr. van Kemenade, in June 1975 and setting out his ideas on the evolution of the entire educational system over the next 25 years. It included a recapitulation of the proposals put forward in more detail in the Higher Education Restructuring Act.

that there was until recently been very little opposition to the Dutch distaste for acknowledging even the existence of class differentiation. One consequence has been the almost total lack of political sociology. Recent developments may, however, have at last brought about the birth to the discipline.[2]

Secondly, neither of the change processes is complete. This is obviously true of the overall policy reforms, as I discuss later. The internal changes in university governance were originally introduced for an experimental period, to run to 1976. This was extended first to 1977 and subsequently to 1982, and whilst one can foresee amendments being made it is unlikely that the reform will be abandoned. I therefore judge it reasonable to treat the period following the 1970 Act as a reform phase which has passed its peak but which cannot yet be said to have matured into stability.

The paper begins, predictably, with a brief sketch of the structure of higher education in the Netherlands. This is followed by a statement of the problems surrounding the changes in the character of university administration. The focus is then extended to the whole of higher education in a discussion of recent initiatives in its planning, although the emphasis still remains on the university sector.

II The Structure of Higher Education

Dutch higher education is divided, in orthodox fashion, into university education and higher vocational education. Less conventional, and of crucial importance for an understanding of the reform proposals, is the jurisdictional basis of the separation: university education is governed by the University Education Act of 1960 and the Academic Statute which emanated from this Act in 1963, whereas higher vocational education falls under the Secondary Education Act, also of 1963. This division, has meant that the 2 sectors have developed

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[2] See P. Ter Hoeven, Social Change and the Rise of Political Studies, Sociologia Neerlandica, Vol. VI, NO. 2, 1970; also Johan Goudsblom, Dutch Society, Random House, 1967, p. 63.

independently of each other, and is seen as the source of many of the obstacles to reform and coordination, a problem to which I return later.

Higher vocational education comprises about 350 institutions, most of which are private (though all are financed equally by the State). The proliferation of these institutions, and their small average size (about 400 students), are due to their essentially specialized character. Most of them are mono-disciplinary, covering such fields as teacher training, agricultural training, domestic services, nautical training and so forth. The other major factor which accounts for the present diffuseness is the division on religious grounds, which persists to a striking extent - it is quite possible for two colleges serving the same function to exist in close geographical proximity (even by Dutch standards), one being Catholic and the other Protestant. There may well be a third, secular, one also in the neighborhood.

In the State higher vocational institutions, responsibility for management rests entirely with the Minister of Education; in private ones, with the board of the controlling foundation. Unlike the university sector, higher vocational institutions are entitled to exercise selection in their admissions, although this is subject to certain minimum requirements established by law.

The university sector comprises two types of institution - universiteiten and hogescholen - but the distinction is essentially a formal one. Quite simply, "an institution that contains fewer than three faculties or no faculty of medicine or of mathematics and natural sciences is a 'hogeschool'."[3] Of the 8 universiteiten, five are State ones (Leiden, Groningen, Utrecht, Rotterdam and Maastricht); there is a denominational (Catholic) university in Nijmegen, and two universities in Amsterdam, one denominational (Protestant) and one municipal. The main difference between State and private universities

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[3] F. Thomassen, University Education in the Netherlands, Higher Education and Research in the Netherlands, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1969.

is that in the latter case the Minister does not exercise the power to appoint the members of the Executive Board, the Rector Magnificus, or the full professors. The hogescholen are 5 in number: 3 of Technology (Delft, Eindhoven and Entschede), one of Agriculture (Wageningen) and one of Economics, Law and Social Sciences in Tilburg. All except the last are State institutions. The distinction explained, I shall follow the usual practice of referring to both as universities.

All universities - private or State - are financed entirely from public funds. "This special - perhaps unique - circumstance is the end-product of the 'school-struggle' that dominated Dutch domestic policy during much of the nineteenth and far into the twentieth century, a struggle for the rights and the financing of private, denominational education as against non-sectarian State education, which as regards primary education was settled in the second decade of this century, after which private continued education and university education were placed on an equal footing with their State equivalents."[4] The enjoyment by private universities of financial equality is provisional only upon compliance with the general rules laid down in the 1960 Act and the Academic Statute, and it is probably true to say that there are hardly any mumblings to be heard on this isue today. However, there are still very real differences of opinion on the right of the government to influence the future of denominational institutions, and the temperature of this particular potato has risen sharply in recent years, burning the fingers of more than one minister.

As for admission to universities, a teaching certificate from the appropriate type of secondary school (gymnasium, athenaeum or lyceum) in principle entitles the student to attend the university of his choice and follow the course of his choice, the only restriction being that for certain disciplines he is required to have studied certain subjects already at school. But since

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[4] Thomassen, Ibid.

1972 (the Student Registration Authorization Act) it has been possible to introduce temporary restrictions on the number of students entering disciplines reckoned to be overcrowded. The method adopted - a combination of preference to those with high marks and a lottery - has attracted a fair amount of attention and controversy. I propose, however, to refer to this 'numerus fixus' phenomenon only in so far as it is symptomatic of a concern to arrive at a better balance between higher education and the labour market.

These, then, are the bones of the higher education structure. (See Chart I.) Their dryness is apparent: I have deliberately abstained from the jucier controversies and problems which fall into one or other of the following sections. It is worth only as a final introductory point referring to the quantitative aspects of the present situation: most of the conventional epithets are applicable to the growth of higher education, as university enrolments shot up from 40,000 in 1960 to 120,000 in 1974; as a proportion of the education budget, university education increased from 8.9% in 1955 and 15.9% in 1965, to almost 25% in 1974, as education absorbed 28% (12 b. guilders) of total government expenditure.

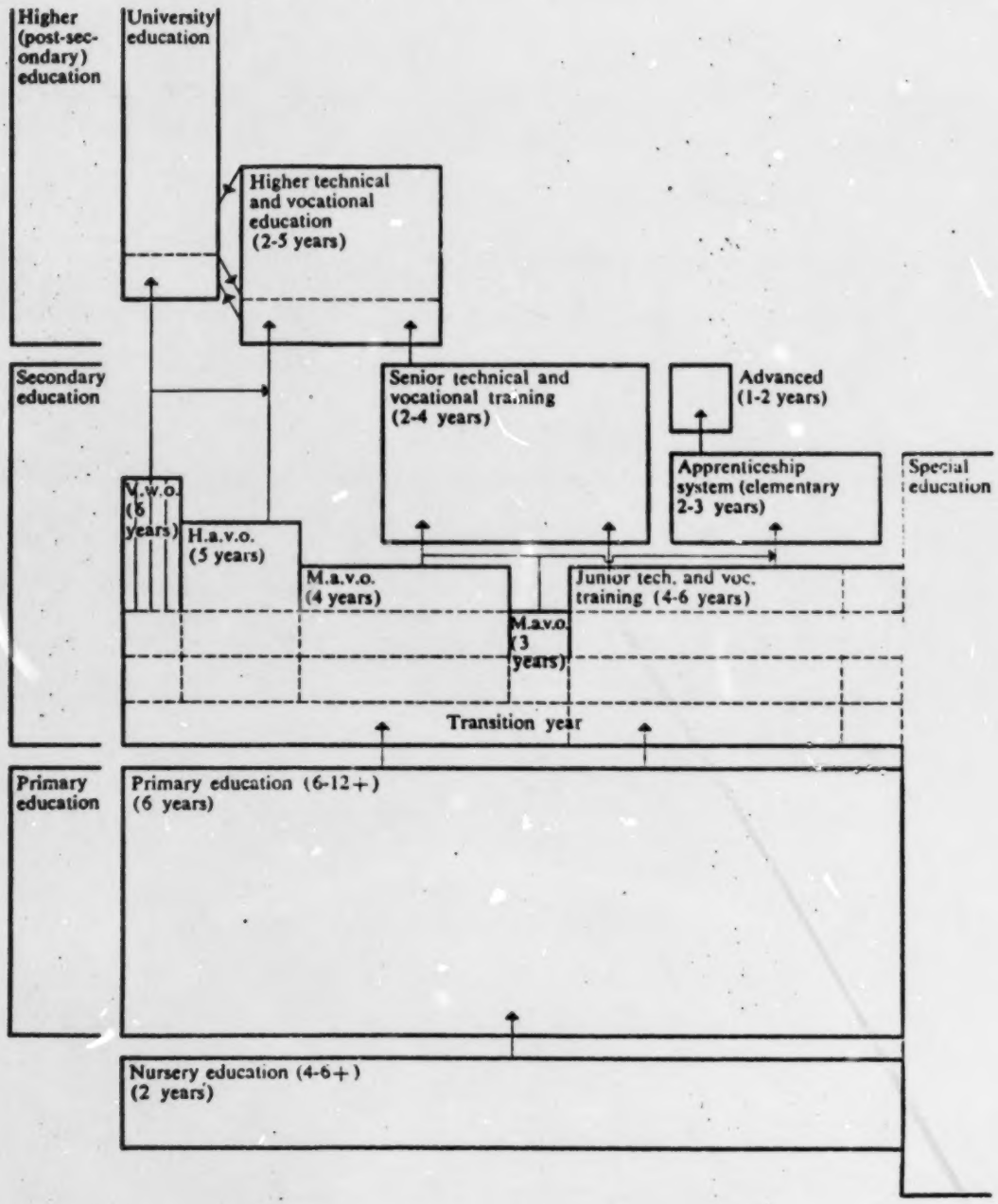
I turn now to the consequences engendered fro the internal organisation of universities by the pressure of this expansion.

III University Governance: From Accommodative Oligarchy to Pluralistic Discomfort

The background: a consensual ethos

Perhaps the main key to an understanding of the difficulties encountered by Dutch universities in reforming their governmental structure is an appreciation of the way in which they previously functioned through the mutual adjustment of small groups to each others' requirements, without undue regard either for clear-cut regulation of responsibility or for the interests of those lower down the hierarchy. In part, this was made possible by the size of the country, which is conducive to easy communication, in part also by the highly consensual,

CHART 1. THE STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS



Source: Some Introductory Notes on Higher Education and Research in the Netherlands, Ministry of Education and Science, The Hague, 1977.

even placid, approach to government in all walks of life. Like mayors, judges and others, the governors of universities felt that provided they behaved in a responsible fashion - and the definition of responsibility was not itself perceived as contentious - there was no particular need to make themselves accountable either to an electorate or to a central, sovereign power. "Dutch rule tended to be pluralist,'accommodative,' collegial, with little trust in concentration of power, or in the will of an electorate."[5]

This characterization enables us to distinguish - albeit only lightly - the governance of Dutch universities from that of universities in some other countries at that time. The professoriat ruled - but more by committee and with less individual autocracy than in countries where a single professor exercised arbitrary power over his fiefdom. But the survival of such a comfortable coterie depends on two things: first, it can only get away with its lack of electoral accountability by anticipating pressures before they build up steam and become prominent as issues of power, and secondly its membership must be restricted to a manageable size. The expansion of higher education generated demands which the university rulers failed to abort; and this failure led in turn to proposals for reform which were inherently incapable of being 'accommodated'in the traditional way.

Lijphart called his book, The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands.[6] But when the pluralism extends only to certain

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[5] H. Daalder, "Universities between 'New Democracy' and 'New Management,'" in Paul Seabury, (ed.), Universities in the Western World, The Free Press, 1975. The growth in the number of small political parties--in all, 29 parties contested the 1971 elections--has been attributed in part precisely to the feeling that the leaders of the big parties were not accountable to the electorate. The perennial manoeuvering to establish coalitions (no single party ever having had a majority in the Netherlands) has meant that voters are not even offered definite programmes, which can only be settled upon as part of the bargaining process; see S. Wolinetz, Dutch Politics in the 1970s, Current History, Vol. 70, April 1977.

[6] Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968.

elite groups, the other term should rather be benevolent oligarchy, unless the ruling groups have a strongly developed sense of what the excluded members of society want. Lijphart himself seems to agree with this, in the light of the terminology he uses in this significant passage: "(since the mid-sixties) groups exhibiting behaviour which is the opposite of political deference, and indifference have become quite suddenly a significant element on the Dutch political scene. Critical questions about the isolationist tendencies of the blocs and about the autocratic attitudes of the elites are raised, and demands for greater popular participation and more elite responsiveness are made with increasing frequency, especially among the younger generation." 'Deference,' 'autocratic', 'elite' - these are hardly terms to characterize a society as allowing the democratic interplay of a plurality of interests.

As long as there is a highly consensual atmosphere, obviously no drastic changes are demanded. But here we come to an intriguing irony. The deep and firm religious divisions had acted, paradoxically, as a firm social cement. But a fundamental reorientation in the leadership of the churches began to take place in the 1960s; from having been an essentially stabilizing force, with their agreement to differ exercising a cohesive influence, they adopted a more actively evangelical role and "as a result, the tight unity of the religious cultures was broken.... Dissension among the leaders made the religious cultures lose their monolithic hold. The masses began to waver between conservative reaction, intellectual disorientation, and growing indifference."[7] Whether

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[7] Daalder, op. cit. The degree to which unquestioning obedience had been expected and the nascent shift from this position can both be neatly illustrated by one example: in 1954 the Dutch bishops considered it realistic to issue a pastoral letter forbidding all Roman Catholics to join a socialist trade union, to visit socialist meetings, to read socialist newspapers, or even to listen to socialist radio programmes; in 1965 the ban was revoked, at least as far as socialist unions were concerned. Again, however, it is unclear whether this was a recognition of the decree's unrealistic and unenforceable character, or a more voluntary measure of liberalisation.

or not Daalder is right in his causality - one could suppose that the church leadership was in fact responding to a tumescent agnosticism towards authority in general and religious dogman in particular - the climate became notably less "accommodative,"and the total strength of the 3 larger religious parties declined in 3 successive elections, from 49.2% of the national vote in 1963 to 37.3% in 1972. The consensus was nowhere near at an end, but as the traditional religious differentiation lost its power of almost complete political determination, so the distribution of power became for the first time a live issue.[8]

As a way of clambering down from these peaks of broad social observation to our particular field of concern, it may be illuminating to juxtapose two generalisations by William Shetter on the evolution of Dutch society, and apply them to the changing expectations of how universities should be run. Commenting on the nineteenth century, Shetter observes that "what strikes us now in all this rapid social transformation is the very smoothness with which the society of the Netherlands again absorbed potentially destructuve revolutionary energy. The answer...seems to lie in the remarkable strength of the middle-class ethic...Whilst it would be absurd to claim that some 6 centuries of social change in the Netherlands can be seen as a continuous demand by the 'out'groups for the right to share in the game played by the 'in', this is not without a certain small element of truth."[9] The demand for university reform, especially by students and untenured staff, could be interpreted in precisely this way; but here is an equally broad, if more historical, quotation which may furnish a parallel pointing in the other direction: "The Burgundian

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[8] See P. Ter Hoeven, Social Change and The Rise of Political Studies, Sociologia Neerlandica, Vol, VI, No. 2, 1970.

[9] William Shetter, The Pillars of Society: 6 Centuries of Civilization in the Netherlands, Ch. 9, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1971.

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Netherlands had a widely diffused cultural ideal of moderation and enlightened, polite behaviour which was fast becoming the distinguishing characteristic of the new 'middle' class; Erasmus' opposition to Luther's Reformation bears distinct marks of a bourgeois reaction to the crude behaviour of an unmannerly peasant."[10] I shall offer no opinion on how far the Dutch professors' reaction to proposals for the reform of university governance resembled that of their illustrious countryman, nor on the similarity of the students or the reforming government to German villeins. The point is that the 'out' groups did not want simply to participate in the game; like Luther, they wished to change its rules.

The argument so far may seem to be leading up to a straightforward analysis of the issue of greater student participation in university governance. This is certainly an important aspect, as we shall see in the next section, but my theme runs along somewhat different lines. It concerns not only a partial transfer of power from professors to junior staff and students, but also the relation of all those groups to central policy-makers, and the way in which the transition from elite to mass higher education exacerbated problems already germinating. For this reason it makes sense to look in the same paper at the internal transformation of universities and at the evolution of the whole of the higher education sector; it is to the details of the former that I now turn.

The Reforms

Up to the 1970 Act, Dutch universities were governed under a dual structure, known as the Duplex Ordo.[11] A Board of Curators drew up administrative regulations, was responsible for financial management, and submitted the annual

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[10] Shetter, op. cit., Ch. 5.

[11] The arrangements described here obtained for State universities; private universities differed slightly but not significantly.

report to the Minister. It was composed of 5-7 members, appointed by the Crown, and exercised a loosely supervisory and largely honorific function. The Senate comprised only full professors, and was responsible for the university's education and research - in other words, the substance of its raison d'être. The chairman of the Senate was appointed by the Crown for renewable 4 year periods and held the title of Rector Magnificus - in effect, the Vice Chancellorship.

The new structure is clearly illustrated in Chart 2, so little exposition is necessary. The major change is obviously in the composition of the University Council and the faculty boards. For the Council, a maximum of five-sixths elected members (the rest being appointed to represent society, by the Crown in the case of state universities and by the foundation board for private universities) are chosen from 3 separate categories: academic staff (excluding student assistants), non-academic staff and students.[12] The first category must have a minimum of one-third of these elected seats (i.e. about 28% of the total), and the other 2 a maximum of one-third each. Parallel with the Council is the Executive Board, consisting of 3 or 5 members: 1 (or two) appointed by the Council from the tenured staff, 1 (or 2) by the Crown or foundation board after consultation with the Council, and the Rector Magnificus (who is the chairman of the board of Deans).

At the faculty level this uneven tripartism is replaced by an uneven bipartism, the division being between academic staff on the one hand (minimum 50%) and non-academic and students on the other (maximum 50%), the board[13]

[12] It is perhaps as well to mention here the habitual Dutch use of 'scientific' in a sense which appears to me to be a precise equivalent of 'academic', without denoting a particular subject specialty or even methodology. I therefore use 'academic' in this context.

[13] For clarity's sake, in spite of some variation in the translation used by the Dutch themselves, I have termed the joint bodies council at the university level, board at the faculty level and committee at the vakgroep level.

CHART OF THE BODIES REFERRED TO IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION (REFORM) ACT 1970

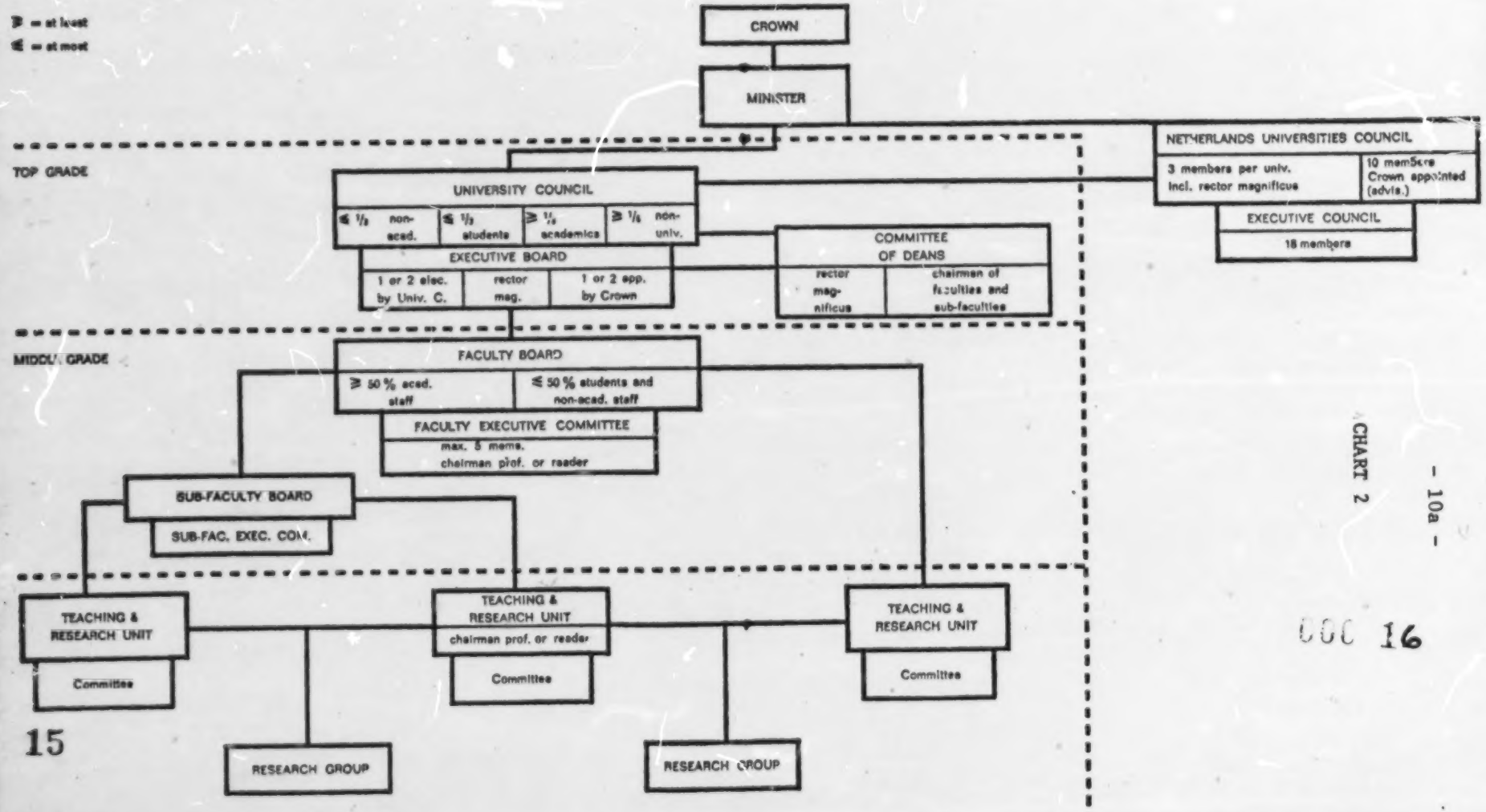

CHART 2

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consisting of a maximum of 40 people. The faculty board is responsible for establishing curricula, and for providing recommendations for the appointment of senior staff.

Below the faculties the basic unit is the vakgroep, a newly established body labelled in the Chart as teaching and research unit. It is the smallest organizational unit, combining the activities of single chairs whose activities lie in the same subject area. Tenured staff are automatically members of the vakgroep committee. Under the original Act they had to constitute at least half of the membership; this has now been amended so that they must be a majority. Other members may be added, it being up to the appropriate faculty board to decide the proportions.

The top-level structure remains, therefore, a dual one, with the University Council and the Executive Board sharing responsibility - sometimes uneasily. The University Council has the power to regulate and administer the affairs of the university as a whole, in so far as such powers have not been specifically entrusted to the Executive Board (Article 20, Section 2); this exception, and the charging of the Executive Board under Article 37 with the day-to-day administration of the university, leave the way open for friction. In the normal style of Dutch affairs, this would not occur, but the relation between the two bodies aroused fierce debate both at the time of the bill's passage and subsequently. The most prominent case was at Delft in 1974, when the Executive Board tried to exercise its formal powers to suspend Council decisions.[14]

It is, however, the relation between the different layers which is of greater interest. The first point to be made is that no generalisation is

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[14] See H. Mason, The Politicized University: Triparity and Tripolarity in the Netherlands, Bulletin of the American Association of University Presidents, Vol. 60, No. 4, December 1970.

possible. Although all the universities are entirely supported by the government, the rate of implementation varied greatly and, more significantly, took different forms according to the degree of friction and politicization. The absence of a national professorial organisation does not help the process of clarification. There is considerable variation, furthermore, amongst faculties and vakgroeps within the same university. I therefore refer directly to the original proposals as a means of gaining a reasonably clear, if somewhat abstract, perspective.

The official objectives of the proposals, as stated in the original Memorandum - dubbed the Veringa Memorandum after the responsible minister - were twofold: to promote the internal democratization of university administration and to increase its efficiency. But in the preamble to the Memorandum, a rationale for the proposed 'fundamentally different organization' was set forth which in effect amounted to a third (or prime) objective: to place the administration of the university as a whole in the hands of bodies of the autonomous university community, and this has in fact been enshrined in subsequent official documents as a third purpose.[15] Conflating the three, we may therefore say that the government's aim was to promote the democracy, efficiency and autonomy of the universities. It is arguable that many of the subsequent problems stemmed directly from this projected simultaneity.

To achieve the goal of democratization, the Memorandum specified four 'starting points': a build-up from the base, i.e. from vakgroeps and faculties to the highest level; the right to codetermination (but - significantly - not necessarily parity of representation) by all ranks; representative democracy

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[15] See, for example, Ministry of Education and Science, Some Introductory Notes on Higher Education and Research in the Netherlands, The Hague, October 1977.

rather than fully participative - i.e. direct elections as opposed to a one-man one-vote system; and maximum openness. Similarly, two 'starting points' were specified for the efficiency objective: unity of administration, meaning that the Council and the Board were to have overlapping responsibilities, and the appointment of full-time administrators. These 6 'starting points' provide a useful framework for a discussion of the reform. The analysis may appear to be predominantly critical, but this may be because bold initiatives tend to attract sharper attacks than quiescence and passivity. It is therefore only fair to point out that the government took a lot of stick for proposals which might have been unnecessary if the universities had taken earlier steps to deflate some of the pressures.

In the first place, we can look for internal inconsistencies and weaknesses. Perhaps the most apparent of these derives from contradictory pressures from senior staff on the one hand and junior staff and students on the other. The latter were pressing for greater democratization, and this was recognized in the first major objective. Senior staff, on the other hand, wanted relief from some of the mundane administrative burdens, and the response was to propose the appointment of more full-time administrators. Whilst bureaucracy and democracy are not incompatible, it is difficult to extend them both simultaneously, at least in an effective fashion. One likely result - as was indeed the case - is an increase in the administrative load without a compensating measure of satisfaction from extended participation.

A key issue which must be dealt with at some length is the difficulty of reconciling the principle of building up from the base with that of the direct election of representatives, especially at upper levels. But before we tackle that issue, the weakness of the proposal for codetermination must be scrutinized. It was seen as applying to 5 groups - professors, other academic staff, non-academic staff, students and representatives of society - but these

in fact came to be reduced to the three already mentioned. This had been partly foreseen in the Memorandum itself, which suggested a lessening of the distinction between professorial and non-professorial staff and was recognised by the Act, with the collapse of these two, for electoral purposes, into one category. There is no prima facie reason why this should not be acceptable, but it appeared as a further threat to the professors and, more importantly, disturbed the foreseen balance of power (given the segregation of society representatives as a separate category in the Council, and their understandable absence from faculty boards and vakgroep committees).

Yet this balance turned out in any case to be chimerical. As already mentioned, codetermination was not equated with parity, and in line with this the 'maximum/minimum' formula was devised - a nice example of an approach which could be alternatively designated as valuably flexible or as open to dangerous uncertainty. In the event, "guaranteed minima were often interpreted as maximal limits, so that the representation of the academic staff was reduced to the absolute minimum prescribed in the Act."[16] It was, perhaps, not so much a case of the 'out' group refusing to abide by the rules, as of it pressing its claims to a share of power in a manner judged 'uncivil' by the academic burghers. This behaviour has been attributed in part to the change in social composition of the student leadership; a stronger element of upwardly mobile students giving rise to a somewhat more syndicalist approach.[17]

We can now revert to the tension between building up from the base and direct elections. The implementation of the Act did not, as far as one can tell, follow a uniform pattern in all universities, but its measures were in

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[16] Daalder, op. cit.

[17] Rob Kroes, Student Participation and Student Radicalism, Sociologia Neerlandica, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1972.

general introduced at the university level before they affected faculties and vakgroeps. The principle of building up from the base was thus rapidly, if predictably, suborned since for it genuinely to have been put into practice would have entailed the deliberate holding back of the formation of faculty boards and the University Council.

Moreover, the implications of this for the eventual character of the whole exercise are pointed up by Kroes' survey of student interests in exercising influence. Contrasting left- and right-oriented students, he found that the former were more concerned with university management, the latter with their 'work situation', comprising mainly the issues which would be decided at vakgroep level - the subject of term papers, for example. Building up from the bases would presumably have resulted in a different balance of student representation.

Top-down implementation, in other words, meant that many of the rules and/or the composition and regulation of faculty were determined by a University Council which had already assumed the tripartite, and often conflictual, character described above.[18] As a consequence, instead of the previous elitist structure being replaced as intended by a more democratic but still accommodative style, faculty meetings tended from the outset to take place in an atmosphere soured by in-fighting and less than conducive to the efficient disposal of business.

The process was repeated between the faculty boards and the vakgroep committees, especially as regards appointment committees. The Act restricted membership of the latter, where full professorships and readerships were con-

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[18] Though it must not be assumed that voting was always en bloc. Indeed, Mason identifies as one of the main problems the fact that the academic staff were often less cohesive than the students, which weakened their voting power.

cerned, to academic staff of that status, but allowed the faculty board to coopt outside 'experts'; the procedure for appointing junior academic staff is left unspecified. Active politicking in the faculty board could therefore lead to the adoption of doubtful 'experts' in the first case and to the establishment of appointment committees for junior staff on which current academic staff had only parity or in some cases less than parity.

Clearly in certain instances this led to unjustifiable procedures, and Daalder is highly scathing on the subject.[19] Yet it is worth reflecting for a moment on how harshly these excesses should be judged. The essential point, it seems to me, is that a transition of the sort that was being attempted inevitably entails in its initial phase a process of testing out, of experimentation to establish where the boundaries of action lie. I suspect that two factors combined to exacerbate the difficulties in this case. First, the academic elites found themselves unable to accommodate troublesome students in the same way as they had been accustomed to accommodating vexatious colleagues; and secondly the increase in time spent in meetings finally exceeded even the gargantuan Dutch appetite for committee work. Being unused to settling matters in other ways, many university people found themselves uncomfortably disoriented.

Two 'starting points' remain to be discussed: maximum openness and unity of administration. On the former it is difficult to comment, except to make the obvious point that public debate is always likely to be more contentious, in the short term at least, than cabalistic decision-making. I would only add that on the broad political front, a good deal of behind the scenes horse-trading had generally been involved in the formation of coalition governments. One of the motives for political reform in the mid-1960s had been the need to

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[19] Daalder, op. cit., esp. p. 218.

end the secret deliberations between the established parties,[20] which presumably also characterized the accommodative style in which universities were governed.

There are two aspects to the question of unity of administration: the intrinsic coherence of the proposal, and the cohesiveness of the groups who would make up the unity. As far as the latter is concerned the replacement, as the academic representatives, of a relatively homogeneous professorial group by a more mixed population is highly relevant. For if the teaching staff as such is to collaborate in administration, the claims of the junior staff to have their interests fully taken into account assume greater significance. So does the failure of the universities to anticipate those claims or, when they reached the stage of articulation, to respond positively to them. In Denmark, for example, a committee set up to scrutinize the administration of higher education and composed of rectors and civil servants recommended in 1969 that there should be a career path for academic staff which was at least well-defined, even if promotion prospects were not altogether bright.[21] To what extent the Danish proposals were actually implemented is another question; but they represent a response to an emergent problem, whereas the Dutch university hierarchy gave the impression of being largely insensitive to the anxieties of newly appointed staff. These had been recruited on a rather haphazard basis, with ill-defined procedures for promotion or tenure, and with their prospects further overshadowed by two Dutch habits: the award of high

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[20] J. van Putten, Political Contestation and Political Protest, 11 Politico, Vol. 35, No. 4, December 1970.

[21] The proposed progression from (untenured) amanuensis to (tenured) lektor, with subsequent promotion to the higher level of associate professor (docent, afdelingslektor, afdelingsprofessor) governed by strict procedures (see Mogens Pedersen, State and University in Denmark: From Coexistence to Collision Course, Historical Research Institute, Odense, 1977).

professorial salaries (which naturally reduced funds available for other staff), and their appointment from outside the university world as well as via the internal labour market[22] - no bad thing intrinsically, but a practice which added to the instability of the untenured.

Unity of administration was undetermined from inside, then, by the inability of the universities to ward off refractive forces by accommodating junior staff into a more cohesive set-up. But the lack of clarity in the allocation of responsibilities made the structure inherently unstable. It may seem unfair to criticize in hindsight, but already at the time of the Memorandum's publication, commentators such as Professor Th. Sniders, the ex Rector Magnificus of Gromingen University, observed that the proposals for two administrative bodies were broken-backed: the University Council was supposed to assume a semi-advisory, semi-policy-making function; the Executive Board was to implement policy but also to share in its formulation. As it turned out, the difficulty of coordination was compounded by the lack of continuity on the University Councils. Perhaps the most reasonable appraisal is again that the structure might have worked if the traditional accommodative approach had been viable - which proved not to be the case.

So far I have rigidly restricted the discussion to the administrative aspects of university reform. Obviously, however, many issues of substantive educational policy, such as the length of courses and the examination system, were closely linked. Before turning to these, I shall briefly summarize the foregoing discussion.

Prior to the reforms of the 1970 Act, the governance of Dutch universities in many ways reflected the style of Dutch government itself. It presented itself as the outcome of private discussion which was restricted to a small

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[22] Mason, op. cit.

number of insiders, an outcome which could not be judged against promise of performance as none had been given or deemed necessary. It depended on a high degree of consensus, on the substance of what was to be decided as much as on the manner in which it was to be decided. Agreements to differ had hitherto given a great deal of stability to this system. But - and here the Dutch events, obviously, had much in common with those in other countries - the influx of students and of new staff in anomalous positions stretched the existing arrangements beyond their capacity, at a speed which did not permit the traditional way of assimilating pressure for change to operate effectively - unless, of course, one judges that the Dutch did in fact avoid the traumatic belligerence of neighboring countries. It may be that changes which constitute a revolution by Dutch standards would appear to observers from other countries as a mild, if confused, transitional period. But commentaries continue to be profoundly pessimistic, the latest being Lijphart's observation to the effect that irreversible damage has been done to the character of Dutch universities, especially through the changes in the methods of staff appointments. Even making allowances for the fact that the forum for his paper was a meeting of the International Council on the Future of Universities, a body which takes a decidedly gloomy view on developments over the last ten years, one can accept that there are major structural problems still to be surmounted.

A final point of general application. Avoidance of an over-legalistic approach, is part of the Dutch liberal tradition,[22] yet many of the problems described here arose out of, or were exacerbated by, the latitude allowed by the legislation. In other cases, however, it would be easy to imagine the opposite criticism being made, namely that legislation was too inflexible,

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[23] "Such [is] the Publick Regularity, as a man may see, their Lawes were made to guide, not to entrap." Sir Thomas Overbury, Observations Upon the Providences United, London, 1651, p. 9.

left no room for compromise and so on. There is, it seems to me, a genuine dilemma here which can easily arise in any issue that brings into question the relations between government and universities.

IV Reform of Higher Education: An Attack on Compartmentalization

We have just looked at some of the consequences of the expansion of university enrolments for their system of governance. We turn now to consider what has been the impact on the higher education sector as a whole, and to reflect more generally on Dutch policy thinking on the post-school sector. The dominant characteristics of the sector will be briefly described, especially those which are seen as problematic, and in the subsequent discussion of the policy responses specific attention will be given to two related issues, one of undeniable importance but perhaps unprepossessing practicality - the relationship with the labour market - the other unusual but illuminating - 'time' as a factor in Dutch higher education. The latter has three dimensions to it: the length of university courses; the relationship between academic autonomy and the time-frame of policy planning; and the distribution of education over the individual's life-cycle.

Both issues will be approached by a consideration of the 1975 Higher Education Restructuring Act and more broadly of the Contours Memorandum. Some of the Contour proposals had already been formulated in other memoranda and were part of official policy; some have already taken legislative form, as with the 1975 Act; but others were presented for the first time and in a highly inchoate form. Comments were solicited, including an OECD educational review, and a revised version issued in 1977.[24] Since then the government has changed and the Minister responsible for the Memorandum, Dr. Jos van Kemenade, is now

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[24] Except where it was necessary to refer to the amended version, my remarks are based upon the original Memorandum.

out of office. The extent to which the various ideas in the Memorandum will be acted upon is therefore even less foreseeable than it ever was, and I have not attempted to describe the position as it now stands.

The Costs of Compartmentalization

A strongly dualistic system is, predictably, dominated by the universities in terms both of prestige and of public support. Unlike Great Britain, with which it shares many historical and constitutional characteristics, the Netherlands was very late in its industrial development, which took off only in the second half of the 19th century. Up to this time, Dutch workers were often trained abroad, and Dutch industry employed many foreigners.[25] In contrast, therefore, to the university sector whose history reaches back some 400 years, the vocational sector is recent and its establishment and development were due to private initiative, with governmental interest first being evinced only in 1919. Full financial support from the government is now taken for granted, but until this decade there was little attempt on the part of the public authorities, influenced perhaps by the neo-humanism of their German neighbour Von Humboldt, to bring the two sectors into any closer relationship. The deep cleft remains, whether or not van Wieringen is right in his attribution of responsibility: "The vocational colleges, especially the technical colleges and the colleges for social work, have always tried to establish some kind of cooperation with the universities. But scepticism was the main reaction from the latter."

Recent growth patterns, however, have propelled the relationship (or lack of it) between the universities and the colleges into a high position on the educational agenda. The swollen population of the universities has reduced

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[25] Alphons van Wieringen, Aspirations and Identity of Vocational Colleges in the Netherlands, Higher Education Review, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1974.

their prestige value both absolutely and (to a lesser degree) in relation to the colleges. As the former expanded from 45,000 to 113,000, an increase of 150%, the number of full-time students in the colleges went up by under 50% in the same period (1961-1971), from 56,000 to 81,000.[26] Moreover, the colleges retained some right of selection, whereas universities were obliged to accept all applicants with the specified qualifications. Their identity has not been put into question in the way the universities' has, and in the mid-70s came the announcement of the government's intention to give them preference in the allocation of resources - a preference whose implications are the starker in that it concerns shares of a static, and not an expanding, cake.

It would be surprising if this last development were unwelcome to the vocational sector. Yet the concomitant policy proposals - to bring them into a closer relationship with the universities - have evoked an ambiguous response. On the one hand, there is the anticipation of an elevation of status, combined with the usual factors which give momentum to academic drift in all institutions lower down in the hierarchy. On the other hand, there is the fear of losing their particular identity, and a reluctance to abandon their clear commitment to non-university students; they take pride in catering more for working class people, and do something to mitigate the dismal Dutch record on the participation of women in higher education.[27] Van Wieringen reports that the vocational sector "as a whole has a reasonable agreement about its difference from the universities.... It is still a matter of decision for the colleges whether to take up a function (or aspiration towards it) as a remedy

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[26] It should be added, however, that part-time enrolments in the colleges are of course considerably higher and have increased at a faster rate than full-time enrolments. They make the total college enrolment up to 135,000.

[27] In 1970, the ratio of female to total enrolment in higher education was 27.5% in the Netherlands - below almost all other OECD countries (see OECD Statistical Yearbook 1974, Table II).

for the troubled universities, or a function more in line with their traditional mission as vocational colleges."

Yet the compartmentalization of Dutch higher education, both between the two sectors and within each sector, has had serious consequences. The fragmentation of the vocational sector, with its plethora of small institutions, has diverted into the universities an uncertain but probably substantial number of students whose original inclination was to attend a vocational college but who were deterred by the limitations imposed by institutional dwarfishness. Similar inefficiencies have resulted from the difficulty, if not impossibility, of transferring from one university to another, and even from one discipline to another within the same university.

This calls for a word of explanation. University students have, or have had until recently, complete freedom in choosing which university to attend, which course to follow, whether or not to attend lectures, and when to take their examinations. But once their choice of institution and course is made, the bond is one of almost mediaeval indissolubility. This ramrod down the back of higher education is further stiffened by the early specialization required.

An interesting contrast can be made in this context with the United Kingdom, for whilst the latter is similarly inflexible in many respects - though perhaps decreasingly so - it at least reaps the benefit of seeing its students complete their courses in a very short period of time and with a very low drop-out rate. In the Netherlands, there have been attempts made since 1946 to reduce the average time spent at the university (of which more later) and there is a 40% failure to complete the course. This is to say nothing of those who struggle through to the end of a course which they perceived early on not to be to their taste; whilst classified statistically as successful completers they would hardly be so judged on more qualitative criteria. This

problem too is compounded by the generally admitted sluggishness of curricular reform.

Long courses, highly specialised and lacking in diversity, minimal possibility of transfer and high drop-out rates with no recognition of incompleted study: this constellation of problems explains in large measure the serious concern with cost-effectiveness and also the creaky articulation with the labour market. It confronts the Dutch with a doubly difficult problem. The longer the courses the higher are the unit costs and the greater the social and individual investment entailed. On the one hand, therefore, this makes it more urgent that the knowledge and skills acquired should have some application at the end, in nowever broad and non-vocational a sense. On the other hand, predicting future needs, both social and economic, becomes less and less feasible. Manpower projections in the Netherlands have often been of a startling crudeness, as the Dutch themselves are aware, but it is worth citing them in any case. In 1968, the forecast was still for a substantial overall shortage of graduates in 1980, ranging from 10% in the medical sphere to 16% for physicists. By 1974 this had swung round to an anticipated surplus of 20,000 by 1980 and a massive 120,000 in 1990. Even a resumption of the exuberant economic growth rates of the 1950s and 1960s would create a demand for only another 30,000 graduates and reduce the gap by a mere 25%. In 1975 Dr. van Kemenade again cited projections of the demand for doctors, vets and agriculturalists to illustrate his argument that the costs of higher education could not continue to rise unchecked.

I am not here attacking the practice of labour market projections, but merely underlining the difficulties the Dutch system has encountered in attempting to establish a satisfactory articulation between higher education and the labour market. Many of van Kemenade's proposals for reform are educationally sensible as well as economically sound. Rather than raise the

whole issue of manpower planning, I shall focus on the notion of 'overqualification', which has tended to gain currency recently in many countries besides the Netherlands. In essence this appears to reflect the fact that some of the jobs which had hitherto been occupied largely by people of a given educational level, for instance upper secondary school, are now being taken by those with higher qualifications such as technical college or even university. The latter are therefore judged to be overqualified for their occupation. But the assumptions behind the judgment need to be made explicit. In the first place it is implied that the previous median or modal level of qualification was in some objective sense the appropriate one. This ignores the historical growth of educational levels, the way in which that growth has sometimes coincided with the evolution of demand for labour and sometimes not, and the fact that we are very unclear about how to decide on the actual degree of that coincidence.

Behind this, however, there lie two further positions, one more ideological, one more economic. The ideological one is that raising education levels and hence, it is assumed, aspirations in this way may induce greater social and industrial unrest and political instability, as a more educated labour force comes into harsh contact with an occupational structure which is failing to evolve or even going in the other direction - shedding some of its skill requirements. The dominant ideological component in this assumption is that the occupational structure is determined externally, and that if the education system fails to make such adjustments as are necessary, the outcome is a disjunction which is dangerous to the well-being of society. The economic position is simpler: unless there is good reason to believe that a continued rise in educational levels is in fact necessitated by occupational requirements, the resources needed for such a rise must be competed for against the claims of other policies and interest groups - in other words, whilst the objective criteria for judging a person as 'overqualified' may often be suspect, it is a useful

way of reminding people that university expansion must be paid for by forsaking alternative uses of the resources devoted to it.

It is the economic rather than the ideological argument which has been more prominent in the Netherlands, at any rate in the mouths of politicians. Higher education absorbs at present 2.01% of the GNP, and a continuation of present trends (as so often an implausible supposition, but one beloved of polemicists wishing to make their point), would mean 3.03% in 1990, with 40% of the 18-24 year olds attending university. In the Contours Memorandum, four measures were proposed for cutting the costs of university education, with estimates of the savings they will allow as percentages of the GNP: encouraging a shift into the non-university sector (0.51%); limitation of the intake into the more expensive university courses (0.50%); increasing the proportion of part-time students (0.37%). The OECD examiners recognised the urgent need for reform of higher education and concurred that too much time and money were being spent on university education, but on the subject of overqualification they pointed out that perhaps "the problem is really about the economy in general, and not about excess supply of manpower as such." They went on to refer to a "strategy of guiding the technology and changing the nature of working life . . . One of the relevant dimensions would be an extension of the capacity of the job to make use of the working man or woman's increased education; thus, the process of adjustment will be placed more on the job itself and less on education."[28]

This argument was accepted in the follow-up version of the Contours Memorandum, revised to take account of the comments which had been solicited and submitted in large numbers. I quote from the English summary: "In the

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[28] Reviews of National Policies for Education, Netherlands: Contours of a Future Education System, OECD, Paris, 1976, p. 47.

follow-up memorandum . . .the tension between education and the labour market is dealt with in great detail. This tension is inherent in the nature of education and the labour market themselves and it must not simply be seen in terms of over-qualification but also in terms of underused capacity."[29] (My emphasis.)

In short, then, the issue of 'overqualification' is not a matter of a simple linear relation between educational levels and skill requirements. It concerns a political decision on the degree to which one can intervene in the demand for labour, so that the employment offered is sufficient in quantity and quality to match the aspirations of an educated community. It also entails political choices on the relative claims of higher (and other) education to scarce resources. Finally, whatever the outcome of the previous two types of decision, it involves more 'internal' educational questions as to how best to deploy those resources once they have been accorded.

This,then, was the first issue - the relationship with the labour market - on which I wished to focus, and I shall shortly discuss the reforms suggested in the Contours Memorandum. The second issue - 'time' as a factor in Dutch higher education - is obviously closely linked in that the length of courses is highly relevant to both, and it will therefore intrude into what follows, but it also has other dimensions which I shall take up later.

Reforms: The Goal of Flexibility

The rationale for the reforms is the conjunction, described above, of a massive growth in university education and the rigid compartmentalization which pervades the whole higher education sector. The basic premise is that there will for the foreseeable future be a static or near-static budget, and this entails the establishment of a better balance in the sector, through the strengthening of the higher vocational part in relation to the universities. The clear

[29] Contours of a Future Education System in the Netherlands: Summary of Contours Memorandum II, Ministry of Education, The Hague, 1977, p. 6.

intention to transfer resources away from the universities derives not from a malicious desire to cut them down to size but from a wish to emphasize the importance of viewing the sector as a whole. It is argued that only by this approach can sufficient diversity be guaranteed. To those involved in comparative higher education, it is interesting to note that the Memorandum frames its proposals explicitly in terms of a cross between the British and American models. It does not analyze them in detail, but its aim is to "combine the British sense of reality [i.e. recognising in the short-term the existence of two unequal sectors] with American flexibility."[30]

The proposals for course reform can be dealt with summarily. The recognition of over-specialization prompts a proposal to introduce more general courses, which will both give students a better grounding and allow them then to exercise a more appropriate choice on the basis of that grounding. It is intended to initiate these courses in late 1978. Complementary to this is the introduction of a national unit/credit system, elaborated in the fifth report of the Commission for the development of higher education. One unit would be the equivalent of a 40 hour week, the aim being to promote transferability both within each sector and between sectors; specific mention is also made in the report of the potential of a unit/credit system for facilitating more recurrent education.

More detailed attention must be given to the changes of the examination structure. The traditional path comprised an initial propaedeutic year, followed after two to four years by the so-called kandidaats exam. The peculiar feature of this apparently orthodox structure is that the kandidaats examination had no effectus civilis, or official external currency, but had as its function to admit the student to the doctoraal course which took another two to four years.

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[30] Contours of a Future Education System in the Netherlands, a Discussion Memorandum, The Hague, 1975, p. 151.

At the end of this period, amounting normally to about seven years and often stretching to nine, an official degree is granted - but even this had a more overtly screening function than its counterpart in most countries, as signified by the title bestowed upon the successful student: Doctorandus (Drs), i.e. (with exemplary adhesion to the gerundive sense) a person fit to be taught, up to the level of doctor.

The Dutch examination system can therefore be seen as an extreme example of a transfer, as opposed to a terminal, system,[31] its function being to give the student a licence to proceed further rather than a certificate of past achievement. Thus the propaedeutic year was one of orientation, which enabled the faculty to give a consilium abeundi to discourage the student from continuing; and kandidaats course led only to the doctoraal, which terminated, as described, in the doctorandus, granting eligibility for the doctorate. The manner in which the system all points forward goes some way towards explaining the long-standing problem of course-length.

More light is shed if one looks at some other aspects of the examination system. First, admission to the universities was to the examinations only - in principle, anyone who paid was free to attend the lectures. This, combined with the power of central regulation laid down in the Academic Statute, ensured universal validity but also gave examinations an unduly preponderant place in university education, especially since staff-student contact was minimal. Even more significant was the traditional right of the student to request to take his examination at any time, give or take a week, and the fact that the examinations were all oral. The arrival of mass higher education clearly rendered this impossible, and examinations now take place twice during the year and are written; but it is worth speculating on how much the 'malfunctioning' - to use

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[31] See Selection and Certification, OECD, Paris, 1977.

a deliberately mechanistic term - of Dutch universities can be attributed to the curious character of the examination process.

The proposed restructuring is simple. The propaedeutic year will continue as before, with one repeat attempt allowed in the case of failure. Admission will then be direct to the doctoraal programme, which is stipulated as three or four years' duration, again with one repeat year permitted.[32] Post-graduate education will follow as usual, with some expansion of the courses available at this level.

The official position expresses bland confidence that these proposals will succeed in reducing the average length of stay at the university. "This situation in which student register periods of seven or eight years are normal, will change when the recently approved act on the restructuring of university education will be implemented. The future course length will be four to five years."[33] Others are less sure, and something of a retreat had already been beaten from the original proposals which stood out more firmly for a uniform structure of four year courses.

The late Professor Posthumus pointed out that although measures had been sought since 1946 to reduce the length of university study, there was no mention at all of the time factor in Dutch legislation on higher education until 1960. Following the 1960 Act, faculties were supposed to establish a ruling on the "desirable" duration of study, but this had no noticeable effect at all, and the average age of completion crept on up to just over 27 - a sociologically disturbing phenomenon, quite apart from its cost implications.[34] These latest

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[32] The result of a second failure is not total exclusion; the candidate may take the examination again, but has no access to financial aid or the educational facilities.

[33] Some introductory notes on higher education and research in the Netherlands, p. 5.

[34] K. Posthumus, National Systems Abroad: The Netherlands, in ed. J. Perkins, Higher Education: from Autonomy to Systems, ICED 1972.

moves, therefore, can be seen as an attempt on the part of the government to implement a reform whose goal is one that commands general assent, but the implications of which were apparently too distasteful for the universities to feel able to take action themselves.[35] Indeed, the special pleading which is going on for exemptions from the proposed course shortening bodes ill for the chances of a concerted university position on the issue.

I turn now from the reform of course structure and length to the proposals for bringing the universities and higher vocational institutes closer together. An attempt at this was made in 1973, but the bill was half-hearted and failed to win passage: there were too few incentives for cooperation, and it would anyway have concerned only courses within each sector which bore some obvious relation to each other rather than the sector as a whole. The Contours Memorandum and the associated Act on the structure of higher education propose the introduction of a new legislative framework for a single system of higher education. This will center round two main initiatives.

The first is to increase cooperation between the two sectors, and this is to be achieved in a number of different ways. It should be made possible for students to transfer in either direction, especially those who have just completed their propaedeutic year. The exchange of skill and the communal use of facilities are to be encouraged. Mutual help can be given in the establishment of new courses and the revision of old ones. And agreements should be made between institutions in the same area on how they might sensibly divide up their responsibilities.

Yet these reforms cannot be accomplished if the present imbalance is maintained, and the second thrust is therefore to unify and strengthen the

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[35] The existence of a consensus is illustrated by the support given by van Kemenade's successor, Dr. Arie Pais - a man of very different political stripe - to the 1976 Act's proposals on this score.

higher vocational sector. Essentially this is to be achieved by grouping the institutes into polytechnics, institutions based on a geographical area roughly twenty kilometers square and with a minimum of 1000-1500 students compared with the current average of 400. An important concomitant step would be the establishment of a Polytechnic Council to run parallel with the University Council.[36]

In reviewing these proposals, and setting them in the context of the autonomy of higher education, it is crucial to underline their voluntarist character. The encouragement is to individual institutions, or groups of institutions, to develop their own modes of cooperation and transfer, and the merging of the vocational institutes will not be compulsory. Denominational institutes can opt to stay outside any coalition, and will then be given associate status. This was re-emphasized in the second version of the Contours Memorandum. "Voluntary assistance and readiness to cooperate are of central importance. And this is the answer to the fear that was expressed that institutions would be more or less forced to merge. It is certainly true that the creation of combined higher education institutes will be encouraged . . . but the individual institutes are quite free to choose whether they want to combine with other institutes to become new-style higher education institutes."[37] The government has enunciated the principles on which it has formulated its policy, but it is up to the institutions to give them concrete effect.

Naturally, however, one is prompted to ask: "And if they don't?" What

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[36] This constitutes a neat example of increasing coordination by "professional route II: the expansion of central collegial bodies" (see Burton Clark, Academic Coordination, ICED, New York, 1978, for a typology of the ways in which governments and higher education systems are responding to pressures for better coordination). However, it is worth noting that the initiative for this has come from the government itself, so that the motive of banding together voluntarily in reaction to growing bureaucratic and political forces is hardly applicable.

[37] The Contours Memorandum (Revised version), p. 101.

latent power backs the government's intentions, and to what extent would they be prepared to use it? I am in no position to answer these questions, and the flux of Dutch politics since the publication of the Memoranda has disrupted any chance of smooth implementation, but the Contours Memorandum is of particular interest precisely because it is so bold and emphatic a statement of educational guidelines for the future.

This brings us back to the question of time as a factor in educational planning, and I wish to relate that particularly to the issue of academic autonomy. The Contours Memorandum carefully distinguished the short-term from the long-term; its remarks for the former are framed as positive policy proposals, but for the latter are put forward very much for discussion. In other words, the government considers that it already has an adequate (if not perfect) basis for decisions on the immediate future, but needs to stimulate debate and elicit new ideas as reactions to its more distant suggestions.

I would argue that judgment of government influence on academic institutions - whether that influence by termed control, interference, guidance or whatever -should depend in part on the time frame involved as well, obviously, as the manner in which it is exercised. Thus the setting up of suggested guidelines for a longer-term policy bears on autonomy in a number of ways. In the first place, it obviates one of the prime sources of institutional disgruntlement: a sense of being hustled into actions for which they have not had time to prepare themselves adequately(and the pace of academic life may differ considerably from that of political life, to say the least). Linked with this is the reassurance of continuity - the announcement of intent well in advance allows those concerned to familiarize themselves with the ideas and adjust accordingly without the sense of shock caused by the sudden unveiling of fully-fledged proposals. Many hostile reactions to new initiatives derive not so much from the intrinsic character of the reforms or even from the fact that they require

something of a jump into the unknown (if they do), as that they are introduced in a way that does not allow adequate practical and psychological preparation.

Not, of course, that previous notice is in any way a guarantee of consensus, let alone unanimity. It can, in fact, merely provide time for opposition to muster, factions to emerge, and dissension generally to spread. But the particular relevance to the issue of academic autonomy is that it gives the institutions concerned the chance to state their views, the corollary being that they are under an obligation to produce more than simply a negative reaction to the original proposals. The opportunity is there to come forward with positive initiatives; if the status quo is to be defended, it must be done on substantive grounds. My argument therefore is that at least some of the requirements for academic autonomy may be met--at any rate in putatively democratic societies--if ample time is allowed for debate on the relevant issues, and for reformulation--or indeed abandonment--of the proposals. The outcome will depend, necessarily, on the distribution of power, but I would suggest that the case for academic autonomy is better grounded if it acknowledges that power is indeed variously distributed and that the character of autonomy is shaped accordingly rather than attempting to isolate the freedom of academic institutions from the forms freedom takes in the rest of society.

The Contours Memorandum constitutes an example of how this somewhat elliptical proposition might be acted upon in practice. The Minister took the risky path of making his thoughts on the future development of education public, a risk compounded by the explicit statement that the longer-term proposals were particularly open to reformulation. There are undoubtedly many technical flaws in the document, especially those deriving from statistical inadequacies and crude costings. But at least from the point of view of stimulating public awareness, it has been a success: over 100,000 copies were sold or distributed, and more than 300 official responses were submitted. The memorandum provided,

therefore, an opportunity for those in higher education to strike a positive note: instead of government-academic relations being defined along a simple axis stretching between total acceptance and wholesale rejection of initiatives, they may assume a more dialectical and productive character. A very simple and narrow illustration is provided by the OECD examiners, on the question of the costs of university education: "An unusually luxurious item appears to be the cost of university education in the Netherlands. A combination of high professional salaries, comparatively favourable staff-student ratios, long courses and high drop-out rates leads to high average costs per graduate. . . . It would be most suitable if university teachers and administrators, being among the most privileged in society, took the lead in seeking economies and providing greater equity in the dispersing of funds for education."[38] I have, in short, been attempting to give a considerable charge to that term "suitable."

As is obvious, I have not directly tackled the issue of the division of decision-making powers between government and academic institutions. Nor have I broached the subject of latent power, of the influences which are exercised on decisions but which cannot be discerned from a look at the formal organisational structure. What I have tried to demonstrate is that within the given decision-making framework it is important to look at the time-frame involved: over what period decisions are taken, how long is the anticipated span of implementation, and what the balance is between short-term and longer-term planning. The Dutch case may provide an illuminating example for comparative purposes. I have suggested that by setting immediate proposals against a background of possible long-term future developments, the authors of the Contours Memorandum may have discharged their public function as government members with responsibility for education, and at the same time done something to safeguard

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[38] Netherlands: Contours of a future education system, p. 55.

academic autonomy from the vagaries of political change, to which they themselves have as it happens now submitted.

Post-school education: other forms

Any discussion of Dutch higher education would be incomplete if it did not include some reference to opportunities outside the formal sector. These can be summarised under 3 headings.

The Open School is the organisation which will coordinate all facilities for further training and education after completion of a conventional education, and will offer some of them itself. As it concerns levels below higher education, I will say only that it represents an interesting attempt to combine the roles of organiser and provider; its efforts are at present geared, on an experimental basis, to 3 target groups.

The Open University is an even newer initiative, which in fact does not appear in the first version of the Contours Memorandum, but was launched in a separate memorandum in March 1977. It will be comparable to the British version, but not identical. In standard Dutch fashion, a committee has been set up to prepare plans. It will be an alternative form of higher education (though again there should be the possibility of transfer) and is expected to be cheaper and more innovative, but genuinely at the same level as other higher education provision. It should take some of the pressure off the other parts of the sector: 15,000 first-year students is the eventual planned intake, with the emphasis on part-time education in order to cater particularly for mature students and those in employment. The growth of paid educational leave is anticipated, but the courses should not be dependent on such leave being available.[39]

The third heading is a more distant prospect but is nevertheless of great

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[39] Memorandum on the Open University in the Netherlands, The Hague, 1977.

potential significance. The revised version of the Contours Memorandum makes a much firmer statement than its predecessor on the subject of a system of learning rights, which it identifies as one of the 5 basic elements in the educational structure (basic education; high school; higher education; second road; learning rights). This is seen as a corrective to the over-emphasis on continuous full-time education; as a way of contributing to greater equality; and as a means of achieving a better relation between higher education and society. The significance lies not in the mechanics of the system, which are not even at the embryonic stage, but in the fact that such a system is envisaged at all. It represents a declaration of public intent to conceive of education as occurring over the individual's lifetime, and despite the great wash of rhetoric on lifelong learning in many countries, the promotion of a national policy which set the financing of all post-compulsory education on this footing would put the Netherlands well in the forefront on this score. Educationally it would be an effective rebuff to the poet Heine's jibe, when he remarked that if the world were to come to an end he would adjourn to Holland, since everything there happens 50 years late.

V Conclusion

The contrast between the 2 halves of this paper is evident. The first part was a retrospective look at the internal workings of a reform of university governance, including a description of the relations between the various actors involved. A state of equilibrium has not yet been reached, but the most acute stages of the transition have passed. The second part has been a broader look at certain structural characteristics of Dutch higher education whose weaknesses have generated proposals for reform, proposals which will apply, if they find application at all, at various points ranging from this year to beyond the foreseeable future. A complete analysis would be impossible under the circumstances, requiring a crystal ball not only of singular clarity

but also of a buoyancy sufficient to keep it afloat on the swirling eddies of the Dutch political current.

The juxtaposition is not, however, without justification. In the first place the 2 halves exemplify, if only partially and without fully confirming the analytical approach, 2 of the processes identified as of contemporary significance in coordinating the organisation of higher education: increased participation within higher education, and increased corporatism in governmental decision-making.[40] The former requires no explanation, the latter does, in that I am adopting the broader interpretation of corporatism, not as the inclusion of business and labour interests but as the extension of participation in policy formulation to interest groups of various hues. In this context the Contours Memorandum would be seen as another step down that route ("political route II"). But--and it is for this reason that this paper does not fully confirm the approach--I would argue that the Minister's initiative represents an attempt to bring to the surface the operations of groups already influencing policy, as well as an invitation to others to enter the arena. I have therefore suggested that universities might wish to recognise themselves as participants in corporatism and by so doing act in the best interests of academic autonomy.

This leads to a brief, and possibly highly tendentious, conclusion. The accommodative elitism of the professional oligarchy showed itself unable to anticipate and cope with the movement towards greater participation in the governance of universities as institutions. The university sector will not be confronted with the same sort of problem vis-a-vis higher education policy in general, as it has been given advance notice of the issues; but it will be called upon to react, and the question is whether it will do so purely defensively, or in a way which convinces a broad and pluralistic audience that it has society's interests at heart.

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[40] Burton Clark, op. cit.

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